

Interview transcript of an email interview with Sally Paine, A Professor of Strategy & Policy at U.S. Naval War College and the author of *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895: Power, Perceptions, and Primacy*

Question: What were some of the leading causes that started the war?

Answer: Wars tend to have underlying and proximate causes which can be viewed, respectively, as the tinder and the match. It takes a match to set off a war but only if there is flammable tinder to ignite.

Question: How did the citizens of each country view the war? How did they react with the end result?

Answer: It is hard to say how "citizens" viewed the war since most Chinese were illiterate and most Japanese could not vote. But one can get a sense of elite opinions--the literate and powerful few. The Chinese leadership was appalled, outraged, but hamstrung, while the Japanese leadership was appalled, outraged, and determined to overturn the results of the Triple Intervention.

Question: What were some of the turning point of the war?

Answer: The war never turned. The Japanese won it from start to finish.

Question: How did this war lead up to and affect the Russo-Japanese War and the Second Sino-Japanese War?

Answer: It did not lead directly to the Russo-Japanese War or the Second Sino-Japanese War. The United States has recently been involved in two wars in Iraq. Can you predict with clarity what the future situation will be in Iraq in ten years (the time frame of the Russo-Japanese War to the First Sino-Japanese War) let alone in forty years (the time between the First and Second Sino-Japanese Wars)? I believe that the answer is a resounding: No. There is enormous contingency in human events. People make choices among alternatives and the present is the aggregation of all of our many choices of the billions of individuals living on this planet.

If China had gotten its own house in order, there would have been no Russo-Japanese War or Second Sino-Japanese War. If Nicholas II of Russia had not decided to reorient Russian foreign policy from Europe to Asia in 1903, there never would have been a Russo-Japanese War. If there had been no Great Depression or if the Western powers had dealt responsibly with the Great Depression instead of erecting tariff walls in an effort to beggar their neighbours, there would have been no rise of Hitler in Europe and no rise of militarists in Japan. Lots of different choices could have been made in lots of different places, any one of which might have yielded very different outcomes.

Question: How did the Koreans play a part in the war?

Answer: They fought an insurgency during the war and very little is known about it. I imagine one would have to read Korean to understand what happened.

Question: How was life for the civilians in each country before, during and after the war?

Answer: For the rich it was ok. For the poor majority it was not. For the civilians on the field of battle, it was a disaster.

Question: What geopolitical problem faces Korean foreign policy makers?

Answer: Geography has located Korea at the grinding point of three very powerful and ambitious countries: Russia, China, and Japan. Korea requires at least one big friend to help counterbalance the others.

Question: Who were some of the commanders who really stood out/made a change during the war?

Answer: On the Chinese side: no one. That was the problem. (Li Hongzhang was a civilian, not an active duty military officer). On the Japanese side: the Genro generation, especially Yamagata Aritomo (Ito was a civilian)

Question: How were the China and Japan before the war? Which was stronger?

Answer: Evidently Japan, although everyone thought China. Strength is not potential strength but usable strength. China was potentially far more powerful than Japan but lacked the ability to marshal its strength. So Japan was stronger in the event.

Question: What kinds of weapons were used in the war? How did this affect the war?

Answer: Effective use of weapons requires not only the equipment but the training to use them. China clearly had not a clue how to deploy its navy.

Question: Were there any foreign allies that aided the two countries?

Answer: Neither country had allies. Japan's first alliance, the Anglo-Japanese alliance would not be signed until 1902.

Question: Which side was Korea on and why?

Answer: The Korean king requested Chinese intervention. Korea was on the Chinese side particularly when Japan intervened aggressively in Korean domestic affairs.

Question: How were the emperors involved in the war?

Answer: The Meiji Emperor was more a symbol of legitimacy than an active ruler. The Guangxu Emperor favoured a strategy of war, but his officials set that strategy.

Question: Were there any big mistakes made by each country?

Answer: Lots. China should have avoided war to focus on domestic reforms. Once in the war, China should have used its navy to target Japanese troop transports and supply lines. China should have defended at Port Arthur but otherwise fought inland to stretch Japanese logistical lines. Japan made few errors. Mainly the army should have listened to the diplomats and refrained from demanding the Liaodong Peninsula. The army should have maintained order and not engaged in a massacre at Port Arthur.